

intersectionality and the city

A one-day interdisciplinary workshop at
De Montfort University, Leicester

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Wednesday 19th June 2019

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Organised by
Dr Kennetta Hammond Perry, Stephen Lawrence Research Centre
Dr Ben Whitham, Centre for Urban Research on Austerity

workshop abstracts

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nadya ali and ben whitham

'The Intersectional Politics of Austerity and Islamophobia in London'

In this paper the authors explore the preliminary findings from a set of depth interviews and focus groups carried out with east Londoners who have experienced Islamophobic / anti-Muslim abuse or discrimination. The aim of our study is to better understand the dimensions and dynamics of the politics of Islamophobia in the context of austerity. While increases in Islamophobic abuse and hate crime are usually correlated, in the work of criminologists and political scientists, to terrorist attacks committed by offenders labelled 'Islamist', the sharpest rises in Islamophobic sentiment and abuse have also taken place during the period of austerity. For instance, the UK referendum on EU membership and the vote to leave or 'Brexit' can be understood as an austerity event, since the referendum campaigns focused on recovering national and local economies through either 'taking back control' or further integration into 'global' markets. Yet it also triggered a spike in reports of Islamophobic hate crime. We explore our preliminary findings through four themes relating to hierarchies of racial and gendered violence: welfare benefits and racialised hierarchies of entitlement; gendered Islamophobia, patriarchy and racism; Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and Paki-bashing; and gentrification, housing and loss of community, and conclude with reflections on the 'political economy of Islamophobia'.

dhiren borisa

'Mapping Cities of Desires on the Internet: Stories of Caste and Queerness, and the City of Delhi'

Who can 'claim' the city? Who can belong? How long does it take to belong to the city? The city always emerges as a contested space of imagination. Employing intersectionality as a frame of analysis, I look at my Dalit identity and my queer desires as not additive but thresholds of survival. Building on this, I use sex as an archive to map everyday spaces of queer desirability in India and foreground caste as a significant axis of queer practice and city making.

I present a weave of stories collated through my work with queer and non-dominant communities to highlight how in the context of LGBT folks in India, spaces are increasingly, neither exclusively online or offline, but are hybrid. I try to explore queer possibilities in our desires and the queering of our cities within their ephemeral nature, in terms of safety, freedom and anonymity. In this process, look at queerness as aspirational amid caste and class anxieties. In how technology mediates our 'many' desires, we look at the play of caste and class in our maps of Grindr, an online smart-phone based dating app, through the city of Delhi. To ask, Both, in terms of spaces that are produced, and geographies of time, - when do desires of certain kinds seem feasible, and for whom? Simultaneously, if the city is already sexual, can it be mapped through a dating App?

shereen fernandez

'Modes of (un)belonging and (in)security: Watching the city through anticipatory geographies'

Since the War on Terror, counter-extremism and counter-terrorism measures have expanded in the UK to reflect on the 'urgent' need to tackle threats as they emerge. By doing so, the obligation to protect and prevent attacks from taking place has become an individualised responsibility, as reflected in the way that the Prevent Duty operates to more everyday encounters with the city, where we are deliberately met with signs and notices of the threat of terrorism. In this talk, I want to discuss what I term 'watching the city' as a mode of security which requires individuals to 'watch out' for threatening and suspicious behaviour. The logic around counter-terrorism is increasingly anticipatory, relying on information which could suggest that individuals may, but more crucially may not, fit the profile of a terrorist and extremist. This watchfulness based on anticipation depends on marking out bodies as being susceptible to terrorism more than others, as being out of place in particular urban spaces. This talk will argue then that adopting an intersectional and critical race analysis to studies on terrorism and surveillance within the city can illuminate how the very policies which are meant to keep us safe are instead exacerbating feelings of insecurity and placelessness.

melissa fielding

'Bodies, housing and home: connecting feminist housing activism'

In this paper I will argue that housing is a key issue for feminist activism and feminist theory, drawing connections between urban struggles and today's contemporary feminist groups. My argument is twofold. First, in recent urban and geographical enquiry, women's organising around access to space has often been neglected, considered within literature as 'community activism'. Second, much of women's organisation has been embedded in a feminist drive for access to space, in the form of a home. Continual re-emergence of issues around housing access for women connect certain political and historical moments. I draw connections between housing and feminist activism, arguing the political relevance of housing in the current economic and political climate of austerity and urban redevelopment.

rita gayle

'Apocalypse Now: Urban Renaissance and the War on Intersectionality'

This working paper will seek to consider methodologies to overcome the apocalyptic threat urban renaissance projects pose to Black women's lives and livelihoods.

The 'urban renaissance' (Atkinson: 2004) describes the model of schemes funded by a complex tapestry of stakeholders (local and national governments, public sector agencies, charities, universities, local and global corporations) assembled as part of a process to prepare large towns and cities for the future economies.

The public image of Britain's urban renaissance is creative and cultural in form. Redevelopment policy strategies operating during this period of Austerity and Brexit are related to intersectionality in that they reject the consideration of race, gender, class and sexuality in their architectural design and community planning processes (Lees:2016).

My PhD research is studying the creative and cultural production of Black feminist millennial collectives presently located across Britain's major cities.

If I am selected to attend Intersectionality and the City, I would explore how the practices of my Black feminist collective case studies are responding locally and nationally to themes of culture and community at a time of hyper gentrification where concepts of Black British community established during the 19th and 20th centuries are at risk of permanent erasure.

amani hassani

'Young Muslim Men Navigating Racialised Masculine Stereotypes in Urban Spaces'

This paper discusses how young Muslim men in Denmark use urban spaces to challenge hegemonic structures of class, ethnicity, religion and masculinity, and the conflation of these into the archetype of the “aggressive Muslim man”. The young men presented in this paper demonstrate the different ways of resisting stereotypes associated with being young, Muslim and of immigrant descent - lower socioeconomic status and education - by highlighting their higher educational background and associating with the affluent parts of Copenhagen. My interlocutors – both women and men – produced a self-image of affluence to counter the hegemonic structures of ‘us vs them’ through their use of particular city spaces. This enabled them to produce a counter-narrative for political stereotypes dominating Danish political discourse and the Danish public’s imagination. The Muslim women in this study – often represented as oppressed by patriarchal structures – felt a need to counter-represent themselves as powerful, independent and rebellious, while the Muslim men responded to their racialization associated with violence, with unfrontational and unthreatening demeanours to achieve social capital in professional and public spaces. The paper thus concludes that the gendered differences in negative racial stereotypes in the Danish context require young Muslim men and women to navigate social spaces differently to achieve social mobility.

joselito ranara jimenez

'Critical Realist Intersectionality (CRI): multi-dimensional irregularity among Filipino/a migrants in Japan'

When used as a social theory, intersectionality neglects ontology, describing how a "matrix of domination" oppresses before declaring what a "matrix of domination" is. Lacking referents, intersectionality adapts to each researcher's goal. Hermeneutically the oppressed carve out "lived experiences," each valid and true. Categories (identity/power/etc) are static, discreet axes the intersections of which predict discrimination (positivism). Critical realism fills intersectionality's ontological void. Multi-dimensional oppression emerges within a three-layered reality (Real/Actual/Empirical) where categories are historically negotiated and "lived experiences" are critical, agential choices structurally/culturally conditioned, not determined. This CRI approach is then applied in an exposition of eleven Filipino/a irregular migrants in Japan. (1) Gender-defined work (entertainers-female/laborers-male), (2) culturally-conditioned breadwinner roles and (3) savings outcomes constrained by vices, infidelities and remittances are scrutinized for interlocking, multi-dimensional structural/cultural conditioning forces against which migrants critically engage, producing differing intensities of handicap and progress.

CRI is a robust explanatory approach that (1) allows an interrogation of potent conditioning forces that at once constrain and enable in concurrent, multi-dimensional and intersecting ways; (2) acknowledges agency as continuously and reflexively assessing decision options; (3) explains how variable outcomes, emerging from the consummation of structure and agency, produce either the maintenance of or emancipation from oppression.

akanksha mehta

'Daily Walks' and Everyday Violence: Hindu Right Wing Women Shape the City'

In Mumbai, India, women from the Hindu nationalist movement have various rituals that assert their domination and claim to the city. One of these practices is the 'Daily Walk' where Hindu Right Wing women who are mostly upper caste and middle class head to a 'Muslim neighbourhood' every few days and chant Islamophobic and anti-pakistani slogans, patrol, surveill, and harass the inhabitants of these buildings, enact physical violence (in the form of throwing stones, banging doors, spitting etc.), and assert a Hindutva claim to the city (and nation). In this paper, I examine this ritual and practice through an intersectional feminist and queer lens that foregrounds the politics of gender, caste, religion, race, and class in the formations and shapes of these encounters. I argue that this 'Daily Walk' not only provides women with an opportunity to further Hindu nationalist violence in the city but that it also enables affective, emotional, and intimate worlds of community and friendship that nurture the right-wing and allow women to negotiate their space and place in the project and the city. This paper, thus, highlights the intimate workings of everyday violence and politics of women in the Hindu Right Wing movement and their negotiations with the city of Mumbai and the spaces they inhabit.

tia ndu

'A Methodology for Intersectionality Research: Analysing the State-Led Gentrification of Broadwater Farm, Post 2011 Riots'

Intersectionality (Crenshaw,1989) is employed widely in research on the state-led gentrification of racially-segregated urban neighbourhoods (e.g. Boyd,2008; Hyra, 2008,2017; Pattillo,2008). However, despite its utility and increasing use in human geography, many of these studies fail to meet the ethical values that underpin the concept (Cho et al,2013). Three main critiques emerge. Firstly, the civil rights movement and black feminist roots of the concept are often overlooked in human geography research, as researchers fail to challenge power-imbalances between research participants and academics, ignoring the social justice aims underpinning intersectionality (Hopkins,2017). Secondly, much existing intersectionality research in human geography has not been inclusive, with many of the most marginalized groups being excluded from the research process (Takeall,2018). Thirdly, human geography research has mostly employed a black/white or other-ethnic-minority/white dichotomy, an approach which ignores the racial and ethnic diversity of many urban neighbourhoods (Price,2010). Resultantly, it has been argued that methodological and ethical advancements in human geography are behind the ethical standards that intersectionality requires (Dowling et al.,2016).

Consequently, this presentation details a methodology that seeks to address the aforementioned issues within research that analyses the impacts of state-led gentrification within Broadwater Farm, a racially-segregated, but ethnically diverse urban neighbourhood in London.

This event was organised by Dr Kennetta Hammond Perry, Reader in History and Director of the Stephen Lawrence Research Centre at De Montfort University, and Dr Ben Whitham, Lecturer in International Politics and member of the Centre for Urban Research on Austerity at De Montfort University.

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For further information about this event and future projects please visit our website:

www.intersectionalityandthecity.com